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TAGS: [SENV PREL](#) [TSPL](#) [KSCA](#) [KGHG](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: U/S OTERO ENGAGES INDIAN MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND
FORESTS SECRETARY SHARMA ON ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION

REF: NEW DELHI 2308

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Following the Global Issues Forum held November 5 (Reftel), Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Otero met with Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) Secretary Sharma on November 6 to discuss areas for global cooperation on environmental issues including forestry, climate change, mercury, and wildlife. U/S Otero noted how bilateral cooperation on these issues underscored the strength and depth of the Indo-U.S. relationship and highlighted the need for India to take the lead in regional environmental cooperation. Secretary Sharma stated India sought a more proactive role in the region and welcomed U.S. collaboration but that on issues such as climate change and mercury abatement, India stood with developing countries and needed both financial assistance and technology transfer to make changes at home. END SUMMARY.
FORESTRY

2. (U) U/S Otero opened the discussion by inquiring into the ministry's forestry policies. Secretary Sharma and Additional Director General of Forests P.B. Gangopadhyay explained India has been pursuing a policy of joint forest management since 1990 focused on providing alternative livelihoods for villagers as well as participation from villagers in the management of forests. Gangopadhyay noted that despite extreme population pressure, India has been able to retain 21 percent of its forest cover although only 2.5 percent is classified as dense forest with 19 percent being degraded forest. Gangopadhyay stated India had a long history of collaboration with the U.S. on forestry going back to USAID programs of the 1980s and very much wanted to increase collaboration in this area.

3. (U) Sharma echoed and emphasized India's desire to collaborate with the U.S. and took the opportunity to push India's position on Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) in the UNFCCC climate negotiations. He stated if countries such as Indonesia and Brazil were to get credit for not destroying their forests, India should get credit for creating more forest cover under its "REDD plus" proposal which would not only protect natural carbon sinks, but also create new sinks via afforestation.

CLIMATE CHANGE

4. (U) Otero and Sharma both recognized the difficulties involved in reaching an internationally binding agreement at the Copenhagen climate talks. Sharma raised the need for a strong U.S. commitment to reduce emissions by 2020 but understood the challenge of passing domestic climate change legislation in the United States. Sharma

stated India faced similar challenges in passing climate legislation through the Indian Parliament. Otero noted climate change was the most challenging issue the two countries could work on together and that bilateral cooperation should continue no matter what resulted at Copenhagen. Sharma strongly agreed stating the GOI very much wanted to continue and step-up bilateral cooperation on climate change technologies stating "wherever there is technology sharing, India and the U.S. can work together."

MERCURY

15. (U) Otero raised the issue of mercury abatement and the need for the U.S and India to work together on reducing mercury use as well as the safe handling and storage of mercury. MoEF Advisor G.K. Pandey responded that India was making great strides in reducing mercury use in the chlor-alkali industry but was concerned about a binding treaty on mercury due to the large penetration of Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFLs) in the Indian market as well as mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants. Pandey stated that if the international community expected India to reduce its mercury emissions, the developed world would have to provide financial assistance as well as transfer the technology necessary to reduce emissions.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

16. (U) Gangopadhyay laid out decades old GOI initiatives aimed at conserving wildlife including the creation of protected areas, wildlife corridors, a wildlife crime control bureau, and the various GOI species conservation programs for tigers, elephants, gangetic

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dolphins, and the Great Indian Bustard. In regard to bilateral cooperation, he noted the excellent cooperation between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Wildlife Institute of India in species conservation. Gangopadhyay also noted more recent cooperation between the Forest Survey of India and NASA on better methodology for identifying forest fires via satellite data.

17. (U) In regard to regional cooperation in wildlife conservation, Sharma raised a recent ministerial meeting held in Delhi between the environment ministers of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). He stated there was a growing commitment within MoEF for regional cooperation on environmental issues and stated India "wanted SAARC to work" in terms of environmental cooperation.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) MoEF clearly wants to engage bilaterally on environmental issues and worked hard to showcase its work in these areas. However, Secretary Sharma and his colleagues tended to exaggerate MoEF's achievements as its longstanding programs in joint forest management, reforestation, species conservation, and wildlife crime are not, and have never been, impressive. However, there appears to be a new interest in regional cooperation coinciding with Minister Jairam Ramesh's tenure at MoEF. Post suspects the strong desire for bilateral cooperation with the U.S. may be designed to build capacity which would allow India to play a greater leadership role in the region.

19. (U) This cable has been approved by Under Secretary Otero.

WHITE